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THE CHIEF LITERARY PRODUCTIONS IN ISRAEL BEFORE THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM.¹

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Fragments from the period of the march through the wilderness and the settling in Canaan.—Literary products from the period of the Judges.—Literary products from the time of David and Solomon.

1. *Fragments from the period of the march through the wilderness and the settling in Canaan.*—Although the true beginning of the historical literature of Israel is to be put, at the earliest, in the ninth century before Christ, fragments are to be found in the books of the Old Testament which arose centuries earlier. These fragments are the folk-songs and stories which were handed down orally from the time that Israel was a nomadic people, before the art of writing was common with others than the leaders. If one is inclined to question this last statement he has but to recall the disdain which many Bedouin tribes today affect toward the ability to write and read, to fancy a feeling of aversion for this art on the part of the masses at that early time.

It is a question whether one in a search after the old pieces of literature is justified in going back to times before the wandering in the wilderness and the settling in Canaan. The question is not whether later Israel knew how to relate with accuracy anything from those days, but whether there exist literary remains from these early times which have been handed down practically intact, or which can be restored to their original form. In other words, we are not concerned about Israelitish traditions about the past history, but about the actually intact or nearly intact writings that have come down from early times. Such material would naturally consist of poetic snatches. To

¹ Translated and condensed from Wildeboer's *Die Litteratur des Alten Testaments*.

these, however, must be added the original decalogue, for this very likely originated with Moses, and probably may be restored from the forms in which we have it (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-18).

In the present stage of scientific investigation it cannot be an occasion of wonder to anyone that many answer the question that has been raised in the negative, while others regard the probability of showing a great age for a few fragments as doubtful. Our attitude is nearest that of the latter class, for we with others are of the opinion that the ten commandments in a shorter form really date from the time of the wanderings. This shorter form consisted originally of ten words which later writers expanded and to which they affixed their own ideas. The process of enlargement was gradual. From the two variant readings of the decalogue it seems probable that both writers transcribed from oral traditions of the original table which had been lost. Of these two the Exodus-version is the oldest, its redaction being in the eighth century before Christ. Yet even it bears traces of later hands in the reason assigned for the Sabbath commandment, and in the presence of Deuteronomic expressions. The author of Deuteronomy evidently had the two separate documents of J and E before him, though the majority of his successors had the compiled work. It was more than two centuries after Deuteronomy was published, and after the P code (*c.* 433 B.C.) had been formulated that the author of our Pentateuch lived (*c.* 400 B.C.) and combined all these writings (J, *c.* ninth century, E, *c.* eighth century, Deut., and P, *c.* 443) into the form in which we have it.

The claim for Mosaic authorship of these ten words has strongly in its favor the unity of the tradition on this point, which, while it does not prove that Moses brought the ten words from Sinai to his people, nevertheless on the whole lends credibility to the account.

In this same period of the wanderings through the wilderness and the conquest of Canaan doubtless belong the Mosaic words which were uttered at the rising up and the resting of the ark (Num. 10:35, 36); the song-fragments concerning the bor-

ders of Moab and Ammon (Num. 21:14^b, 15); the song of the well (vss. 17^b, 18), and the song of the fall of Heshbon (vss. 27^b–30), although Meyer and Stade would assign it to some time in the Omri dynasty when Northern Israel was contending with Moab. The song on the passage of the Red Sea (Ex. 15:1–18) was composed in Canaan verses 13, 14 and 17 presupposing a settlement in Canaan, while verse 17 also presupposes the sanctuary of later days. It can be, however, a wider expansion of true Mosaic words as they are preserved for us in verse 21. Critics, however, differ as to the Mosaic kernel in this passage.

The remaining poetical portions of the Pentateuch were all composed in Canaan. In some cases it may be possible to discover a germ from the time of Moses. The song and blessing of Moses (Deut. 32, 33), the blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:3–27), and the Balaam utterances, preserved by J in Num. 24, and by E in Num. 23, while they certainly contain old material are not to be treated here.

2. *Literary products from the period of the Judges.*—From the heroic age of Israelitish folk lore one can *a priori* scarcely look for other than poetic productions. The stories of this so-called period of the Judges, the duration of which on the basis of the Old Testament record itself must be reckoned as 200 or 300 years, we know from accounts the earliest statement of which does not date further back than the ninth century B.C.

Yet the accounts of the tribal heroes take their origin in this period and preserve for us a history of those days in their references to contemporaneous events and in allusions to the prevailing conditions. In the foreground as an historical monument of great worth must be mentioned the song of Deborah (Judges 5). From a literary point of view it is of the highest value although on exegetical and critical grounds this poem cannot be assigned to Deborah (Budde, who regards vs. 7^b as a gloss, to the contrary notwithstanding). It is lyric and epic in character and is the only one of many songs that doubtless existed in those times which has come down to us. In connection with the historical song of Judges 5 we are able with a great degree of

probability to trace back a parable to the time of the Judges. The fable of Jotham (Judges 9:8-15) wherein the trees of the forest desire a king, must, particularly on account of its contents, be placed in the days of the kingdom, or at least in the early times when Israel was united under the rule of a king. [The whole ninth chapter of Judges belongs to the oldest remnants of historiography.] There is nothing to indicate that Jotham himself invented this fable. Apart from a war song and a parable, there may be placed in this period, with great probability, some utterances or proverbs which are contained in Gen. 49:3-27. The name of this poem, the blessings of Jacob, does not correspond throughout with its contents. In the full signification of the word the name applies only to the words spoken to Judah and Joseph (vss. 8-12 and 22-26), while Simeon and Levi were even cursed (vss. 45-7). A more appropriate name for this poem would be the testament of Jacob. In its present form the whole dates from the monarchy and probably from sometime after the reign of Solomon, though several of the statements in this section must be dated from the time of the Judges. Dillmann assigns it all to the period of the Judges. To be sure Cornill has called attention to the fact that the blessing as a whole can scarcely be older than the monarchy of David who first united the tribes into a whole, but the uncertainty which prevails as to the unity of Israel before the monarchy would seem to weaken his position. Kuenen from verse 10 thinks that the utterances concerning Judah (9-12) can scarcely have been written before David, moreover, that the mention of Joseph as "crowned among his brethren" points to a time after a king had come forth from his midst, *i. e.*, to the founding of the Ephraimitic kingdom.

The greatest importance for establishing a date attaches to the circumstance that Judah and Joseph are so exceptionally blessed. This indicates dominion on the part of the house of Joseph and the reign of Judah under the Davidic dynasty. The reference to Joseph as "crowned among his brethren," verse 23, which probably points to the incursion of the Syrians from Damascus, and other allusions which might be adduced indicate

a time after the division of the kingdom. And finally in this connection it must be mentioned that the blessing of Moses (Deut. 33) is dependent on our poem.

3. *Literary products from the time of David and Solomon.*—A strictly historical investigation cannot indeed ascribe to the century of David and Solomon anything like the literary life which from the traditional point of view is customarily ascribed to it. Nevertheless in the history of the literature of Israel this period remains extremely important. The new order of things, the changed conditions in consequence of the introduction of the monarchy did not indeed evoke straightway such a revolution as later generations imagined. However the great meaning of these new times later writers have well grasped and expressed in their idealization.

Under David Israel is becoming a strong and settled state, one of the first conditions of literary development. Through successfully conducted wars prosperity is established and self-confidence is aroused. Later, under Solomon, commerce has its rise; relationships are established with foreign nations which widened the circle of vision; man begins to look around and ask in what relation he stood to these foreign peoples; ethnological and genealogical traditions were collected and compared and thus were prepared the old accounts.

Only a very few pieces can be assigned to David or Solomon with any certainty. The psalms of David cannot be pointed out definitely. This is our position, as over against the traditional view which on account of the seeming avowal of the superscriptions attributes seventy-three psalms to David. If anyone desires to hold fast to the authenticity and the explanation of לָדָוִד as meaning composed by David three ways are open to him:

(a) Some understand that David's poems were noted down by himself, and even from the beginning supplied with a superscription (Keil). But one is aware of the fact that in the historical books of the Old Testament mention is made merely of an oral tradition of these Davidic poems and that historical poems are indeed contained in the song-books. On the contrary,

the preëxilic history shows nothing of a liturgical collection. Moreover such Semitic students as Noeldeke and Ahlwardt have declared that these superscriptions carry no weight of authority with them as it was common practice in order to get a new poem into circulation to give it an old name.

(*b*) It might be supposed that the post-exilic compiler of the different groups of psalms combined in our Psalter would have made an examination. But apart from the fact that this is a mere hypothesis without foundation there would be every reason to be suspicious of the historico-critical methods of such an examination.

(*c*) A third possibility is that a Davidic collection had existed, so-called because in it stood songs attributed to David (rightly or wrongly) and that when these songs were scattered in the five books of psalms which we now possess, each poem received this superscription. This view has the greatest probability. And if one cannot state definitely that this or that psalm, on the ground of its superscription, is of David, yet it can be affirmed that among the seventy-three bearing the superscription לְדָוִד some either wholly or in part originated with him.

It may be remarked, however, that לְדָוִד, properly speaking, does not mean more than that some sort of relation existed between David and the collection. The term is very comprehensive in character and on this account is perhaps best translated by the word "Davidic." It then, like so many other superscriptions, might refer to form, music or the diction of the piece.

We cannot agree with Cheyne in thinking that the oldest reference to David in this connection (Am. 6: 5, 6) as singer and harpist, necessitates our thinking of his compositions as simply secular songs, but rather that he was not ranked primarily as a liturgical poet. The whole question of determining the Davidic element in the Psalter is extremely difficult. It may be that form and contents must be considered together so that the original Davidic collection, the most of which is in Pss. 3-41, would be so-called as much on account of its form as because Davidic expressions and the larger part of his poems are therein con-

tained. Cheyne has truly said that the tracing up of Davidic psalms as Ewald has done, who thinks that he has discovered fourteen such, does not rest on sound critical principles. Let one be satisfied with our meager result and bear in mind that in giving up the assumed Davidic origin we do not lose the precious songs themselves.

The exception that is often made of Ps. 18, on the ground that it already exists in 2 Sam. 22, must be disregarded. Not only does the position of these words make it very probable that they have crept in here from a psalm-book, but the contents of the song is not appropriate in this connection. On the same grounds the last words of David, 2 Sam. 23:1-7, on account of their position cannot be ascribed to him.

There is reason, however, to ascribe to David the beautiful song of the bow, or the lament for Saul and Jonathan, 2 Sam. 1:19-27, as well as that over Abner, 2 Sam. 3:33*b*-34*a*. From these we may learn not only of David's poetic ability, but we may also catch a glimpse of his noble heart. Cornill goes so far as to say that there is not the shadow of a reason for denying the authenticity of the song of the bow.

The much mutilated text argues for a great antiquity and the contents confirm this view. The representation of the event is lifelike and realistic. The author speaks of persons and locality so definitely as to give the impression that he stands near to the events. The latter of these two pieces, the lament over the chief captain of Saul, may very well have originated from one who acted so magnanimously toward that persecuting monarch. Only an extreme reaction against former confusion of idealization and actual history can detect any insincerity in this.

The mistake has been made of conjecturing that because these two songs lack the religious element, David could not have composed any religious poems (Cornill, *Einl.*² p. 214). On the other hand it would be very improbable that this true, fervid and poetically gifted worshiper of Jehovah would have never poured out his heart in religious songs.

If one wishes to rightly understand Solomon and his meaning for the history of his people he must carefully differentiate

between the idealization of the later historian who looked back upon the riches and wisdom of the monarch with eyes almost blinded to all else, and the opinion of his contemporaries which one can make out between the lines in the books of the Bible.

The author of the Book of Kings wrote about 600 B.C., when the political situation of foreign oppression afforded such glaring contrast to the times of David and Solomon. He looked back with a feeling of longing to that period of splendor. Nor was he peculiar in this particular, men of such importance as Isaiah and Micah were expecting a second David to restore Israel and re-introduce an era of prosperity. The remembrance of Solomon's reign and power coupled with his wisdom lived on while the dark side of his reign was buried in forgetfulness. Evidently the author of Kings belonged to those who idealized Solomon's reign. Nevertheless, with the characteristic fidelity of Oriental historians he has not intentionally obscured other accounts. Solomon first held the throne securely after a fratricide (1 Kings 1:2).

1 Kings 11 informs us of his idolatry, and between the lines we read all too clearly that greatness and might counted for more with David's son than did the welfare of his subjects. We know that the condition of the realm internally was a bad one, for immediately after Solomon's death occurred the irremediable division into two kingdoms.

On account of this idealization of later writers we must attach more significance to the historical accounts of the part played by Solomon in the development of the literature than to the opinion of later Jewish scholars who have attributed to him poems and books which had their origin centuries later. 1 Kings 4:29-34 speaks of Solomon as the author of 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs concerning trees, beasts, birds, creeping things and fishes. Certainly the author of Kings, who wrote about 600 B.C., could not have had our Book of Proverbs before him, for it contains barely 541 *maschals*, more than 100 of which are duplicates. Moreover, with the exception of chapter 30 of Proverbs the character of these proverbs is not at all similar to that of which

the author of Kings speaks. In fact it is improbable that Solomon composed even that part of Proverbs which a special superscription ascribes to him, namely, chaps. 10:1-22:16, and chaps. 25-29. The words in many cases are not those of a king; often it is the people who speak. Moreover, monogamy which is everywhere taken for granted in Proverbs would hardly harmonize with the times of Solomon. Solomon's wisdom was of a practical nature. To be sure he was talented, but there is a considerable difference between the wisdom which the historical accounts represent Solomon as possessing and that which later Jewish scribes, in assigning Proverbs to him, affirm that he possessed. When the character of the Hebrew wisdom underwent a transformation in the Grecian period and took on more of philosophy in the Greek sense of the word, the contents of the book of Ecclesiastes was attributed to him. Likewise poetical pieces such as the song of Solomon, which hitherto had been thought to be composed against Solomon rather than by him, together with certain Psalms, for example, 72 and 127, came to be regarded as products of his muse. If it is not possible to make out with certainty what poem or proverb originated with this wise king at least one authentic utterance of his very probably has come down to us, namely, that with which he dedicated the temple (1 Kings 8:12, 13). Cheyne's uncertainty on this point is unnecessary. The piece very probably comes from the eleventh or tenth century B. C.

Other pieces than these that have been mentioned cannot be assigned with sufficient certitude to the times of David and Solomon. Surely such monuments of the literary life of that age are not to be looked for in Chronicles which was written about 250 B.C., for while these books, rightly interpreted, are very important as a source of history, they have throughout the coloring of the times in which they were written.

The song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10) which some might naturally assign to the times between the Judges and the Monarchy on account of its poetic structure is in tone and spirit Deuteronomic. Kuenen's position in regarding this as pre-exilic as over against Cheyne's assignment of it to post-exilic times

appears to us more probable. The beautiful parable of Nathan (2 Sam. 12:1-4) although occurring in a valuable old historical record, is not on that account to be considered as now being in the form in which it was spoken by him.

No consideration of this subject would be complete that did not call attention to the great significance which the development of prophecy in this period must have had for the literature. The treatment of this, however, hardly belongs here, for its influence really first disclosed itself later on.